

*Description of two antient mansion houses in Northamptonshire and Dorset. By Richard Gough.*

Read at the SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES Dec. 3, 1789.

THE drawing herewith exhibited, taken by Mr. Schnebelie in the course of last summer, represents a fragment of one of the oldest *mansion houses* in this kingdom.

It was the seat of the family of *Longueville* from the reign of Edward II. when John de Longueville levied a fine of the manor of *Little Billing*, in the hundred of Spelho, and county of Northampton, where this house is situate. This John, who was declared lord of the manor 9 Edw. II. founded the house of Austin Friars in the town of Northampton, 16th of said reign, to which several of his descendants were benefactors, and were there buried, as was probably the founder himself. In this family the manor of Little Billing continued till the reign of Elizabeth.

Leland [a] thus describes this building:

“The eldest house or manor place of the Langevilles, yet remaynith at Little Billinge, about a 3 miles est from Northampton.”

[a] It. IV. 40.

Mr. Bridges [b] the historian of Northamptonshire gives this account of it.

“Part of the mansion house, which was formerly inhabited by the Longevilles, is still left standing, and hath great marks of antiquity remaining. The first story is supported with broad arches, where is the appearance of a chapel. The door-cases of Harleston freestone are thick and large. And at the south end is a turret, with a stair-case leading up to the leads. A part of it is embattled. In the yard is the farm-house, made out of the ruins adjoining to the ruinous part.”

Messrs. Buck engraved a view of these ruins 1729; but have called them by mistake a *Cistercian priory*. What could have suggested this idea it is not easy to say; for there is nothing in the parish to give rise to it. Perhaps they confounded it with the religious house founded by the same family in Northampton as before mentioned.

The ruins are much reduced in a course of 60 years. The hexagon turret and all the building to the west of it is gone. In the present view only the east part of the north side is seen in which is a large bay window below, and a long casement above it, with a large chimney to the east.

Mr. Hutchins, in his History of Dorset [c], has given a view not unlike this, with a plan, of a mansion house in Great Canford, which belonged to the family of Montacute, earls of Salisbury, about the middle of the reign of Edward III. and was the chief place of their residence. The remains were intirely taken away 1765: but before that time consisted of a suite of

[b] I. 409.

[c] II. 100. 107.

of three rooms running from east to west. The most eastern was about 25 feet square, and had a stair case tower at the north-east angle. To this room adjoined on the north side a square tower over a gateway. On the west side of the first room adjoining another 48 feet long by 25 wide, communicating with it by a door, and having a fire place in its south side, and two large oriel windows in its north. The westernmost room of this suite was 33 feet by 25, and had two windows in the north, and two in the west front, and a square tower at the north west corner. Behind all these, but parallel with their line, were offices, such as kitchen and wash-house, with their chimnies back to back, and at the end a stable, and another room. There was no appearance of a quadrangular or other court. The house fronted to the river Stour, which was at no great distance from it.

These two mansions may be considered as a kind of structure between the castles, calculated for military defence, and the manor houses or palaces of the nobility in the reigns of Elizabeth and the two Henrys preceding her.

Spofford castle in Yorkshire comes the nearest to these two in point of time and plan; built, as Mr. King [*d*] observes, about the time of Edward III. in imitation of the style of architecture then introduced; when the idea of the close compact well secured *keep* was nearly laid aside; when that even of the *castle* began to be considered as of importance in *name*, rather than in reality, and when the idea of the convenient hospitable *palace* was adopted and brought into use.

[*d*] *Archæologia*, Vol. VI. 342.





